

Dear Senator Harp, Senator Prague, Representative Walker, Representative Hamm, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am asking you to vote against House Bill # 6380, which would split the Board of Education and Services for the Blind in two, and consolidate the resulting pieces with the DOE and DSS respectively.

BESB serves a low-incidence population with highly specialized needs. Within this centralized agency, TVIs (Teachers of the Visually Impaired), Orientation & Mobility Specialists, Rehab Teachers, Voc Rehab Counselors, Technology Specialists and Adult Services Personnel are able to provide coordinated services to the 1100 blind and visually impaired children and 12,000 adults in our state.

Besides specialized services, BESB also runs numerous programs for students, parents, and other professionals involved in the lives of persons who are blind. These include: summer programs to teach the expanded core curriculum, sports weekends, ADL training for students, In -service training for classroom teachers, PE teachers, OTs, PTs, and paraprofessionals, Braille transcriptionist training, field trips for groups of students, parent education events, as well as technology training for students and paraprofessionals. BESB provides these trainings at no charge, and they are facilitated by BESB professionals in all divisions at the Windsor Ave location.

Splitting the agency will result in the need to duplicate, and very likely eliminate, services to CT residents who are blind. There is one \$50,000.00 Braille embosser (printer) which is shared by all divisions. There is one BESB professional library, one technology lab, one low vision clinic. How will we continue to share these resources if we are split? Where will we conduct all of the specialized programs listed above? Where will our Braille library, which houses 60,000 volumes, and our volunteer braillists, and their equipment, be housed? Where will we keep all of the specialized equipment that we loan to students?

I am employed at BESB as a TVI. I work closely with O&M specialists, our Braille Coordinator, Voc Rehab Counselors, and our College Transition Coordinator. The students that I serve benefit from the expertise of a team of professionals.

BESB was established in 1893. The agency has been around for 118 years, and it provides services to persons who are legally blind from birth to death. The centralized model for the agency is cost effective and efficient. Please allow BESB to continue as a cohesive, well-functioning agency.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Sincerely,

Laura Drufva